AMENDMENT

In the Claims:

The following listing reflects amendments to the claims and replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in this application.

1-17. (Cancelled)

18. (Currently amended) A method for screening chemical compounds for ability to ~~bind to the region of HCV responsible~~ compete with hepatitis C virus for binding to a host cell receptor, comprising measuring the binding of a chemical compound to ~~be screened to a~~ an unglycosylated, transmembrane protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd as determined by SDS PAGE and which binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus wherein said protein is stable to acetone precipitation, or a ~~functionally equivalent variant or~~ fragment thereof wherein said fragment is a truncated form of the protein that lacks a functional portion of a transmembrane domain and binds the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus.

19-23. (Cancelled)

24. (New) The method of claim 18, wherein the protein is produced by a process comprising:

(a) providing a mammalian cell that expresses said 24 kd protein;

(b) recovering and solubilizing membranes from said mammalian cell to provide a cell membrane preparation;

(c) subjecting the cell membrane preparation to ammonium sulfate precipitation at less than 33% saturation and retaining the supernatant;

(d) subjecting the supernatant to ammonium sulfate precipitation at between 33% and 50% saturation and retaining the precipitate;

(e) resuspending the precipitate;

(f) subjecting the precipitate to hydrophobic interaction chromatograpy and recovering the nonretained material.

25. (New) The method of claim 24, wherein the mammalian cell that expresses said 24 kd protein hyperexpresses said 24 kd protein.

26. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein the mammalian cell is a MOLT-4 cell.

27. (New) The method of claim 26, wherein the cell membrane preparation is a plasma cell membrane preparation.

28. (New) A method for screening for chemical compounds that mimic the HCV surface structure that binds to the HCV receptor, comprising measuring the binding a chemical compound to an unglycosylated, transmembrane protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd as determined by SDS PAGE and which binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus wherein said protein is stable to acetone precipitation, or a fragment thereof wherein said fragment is a truncated form of the protein that lacks a functional portion of a transmembrane domain and binds the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus.

29. (New) The method of claim 28, wherein the protein is produced by a process comprising:

(a) providing a mammalian cell that expresses said 24 kd protein;

(b) recovering and solubilizing membranes from said mammalian cell to provide a cell membrane preparation;

(c) subjecting the cell membrane preparation to ammonium sulfate precipitation at less than 33% saturation and retaining the supernatant;

(d) subjecting the supernatant to ammonium sulfate precipitation at between 33% and 50% saturation and retaining the precipitate;

(e) resuspending the precipitate;

(f) subjecting the precipitate to hydrophobic interaction chromatograpy and recovering the nonretained material.

30. (New) The method of claim 29, wherein the mammalian cell that expresses said 24 kd protein hyperexpresses said 24 kd protein.

31. (New) The method of claim 30, wherein the mammalian cell is a MOLT-4 cell.

32. (New) The method of claim 31, wherein the cell membrane preparation is a plasma cell membrane preparation.